

SKY WOMAN

A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

by  
Libby Claire Rosa  
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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Libby Rosa presents her MFA thesis exhibition *Sky Woman* in Bibliowicz gallery, Ithaca NY. This new body of work evokes the feelings of being in the presence of waterfalls. Inspired by Ithaca's many gorges and falls, Rosa uses paint to splatter and layer visual experiences that reflect both the imaginary and observable world. She intentionally uses tools and processes that connect the imagery to their mark making. She uses the traditional paintbrush to render hair, a squeegee to paint flowing water, and cuts into the canvas to create holes and spaces to fill. Within the paintings, symbols and figures appear from myths such as the goddess from the Iroquois creation story *Sky Woman* and objects such as anklets from the South Indian epic *Kannagi's Anklet*. Along with her desire to highlight the fluidity of paint, Rosa shows the visual and visceral pleasure in experiencing these natural wonders in the face of a swiftly changing and vulnerable global landscape.



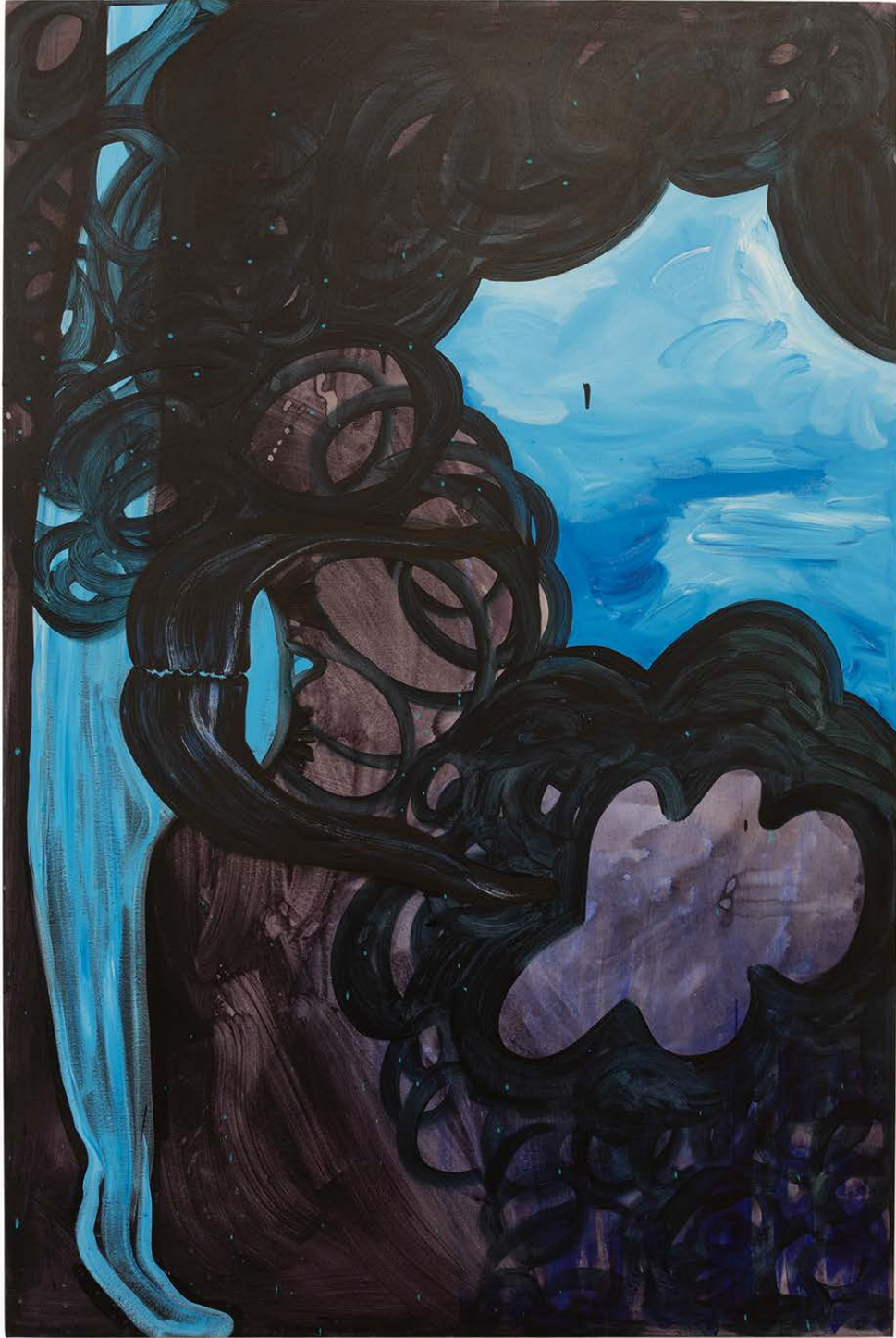




### Mirrors and Windows verses Fluidity and Materiality

The work acknowledges and references the history of painting before and after Modernism. The paintings function as illusionary windows or mirrors with *mise en abîmes* that reveal worlds within worlds. At the same time, the works poke at the materiality and fluidity of paint on two-dimensional surfaces. The paintings lose their functionality as windows when drips of paint interrupt the representational landscapes. It's about paint *and* creating imaginary worlds.





Libby Rosa, *Sky Woman*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

## Abstraction and Representation

The work blurs the distinction between abstraction and representation causing cognitive dissonance. The painterly situations showcase the metamorphic nature of paint. At times, linear drawing strokes delineate bodies and cave-like architectural frames. In other areas, these same strokes express abstract, atmospheric passages of color and textures. Questioning where the representational motifs start and stop and where the painterly abstractions begin and end is central to how the work is visually experienced.

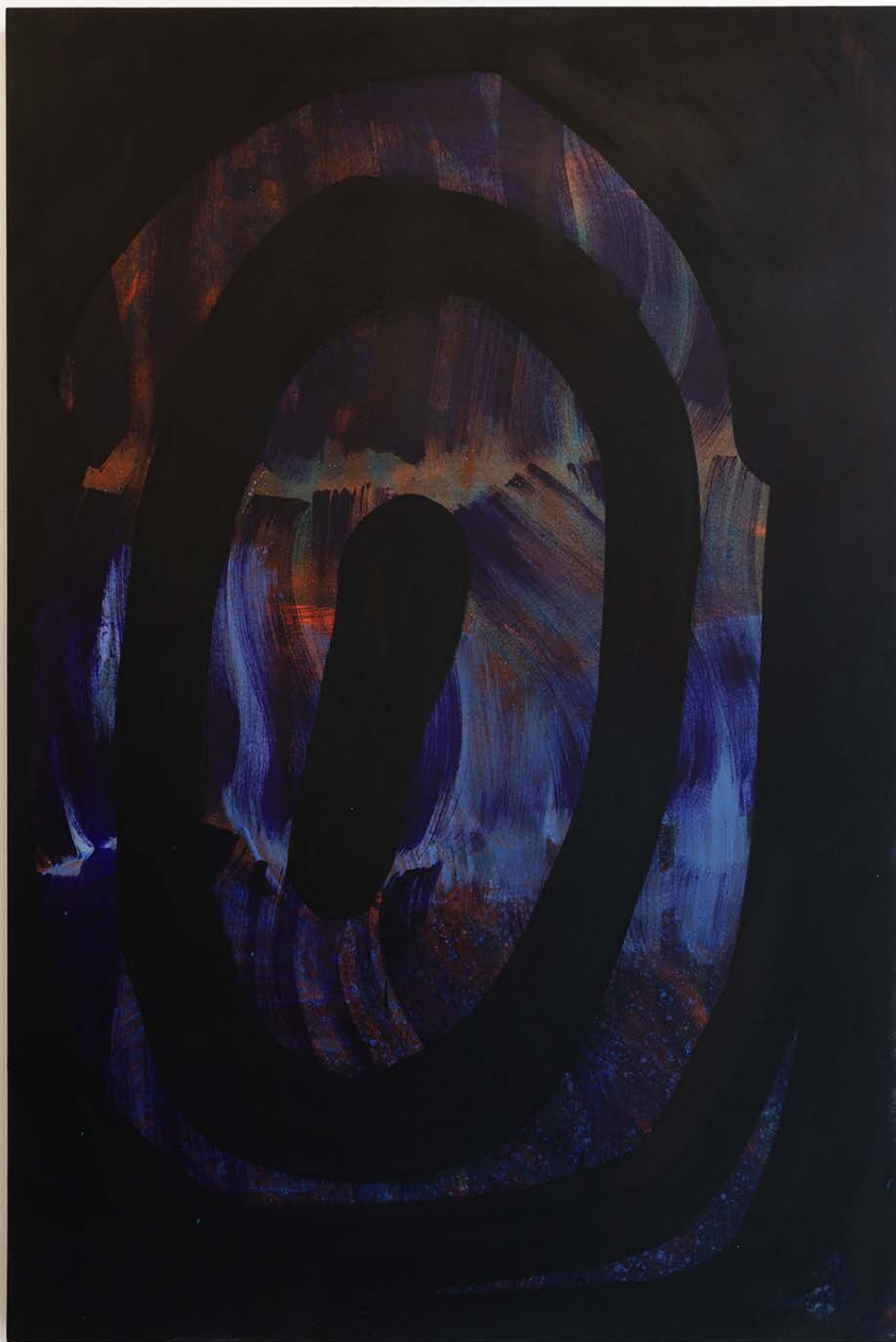


Libby Rosa, *Journey Behind the Falls*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

## Scale

The paintings are usually large to facilitate feelings of immersion. They invite viewers to enter each scene and force them to consider what their relationship is to the spaces before them. Although the works are large, the scale of the imagery is often indeterminate. Some works play as micro views, such as seeing through one's own wet eyelashes, while others are zoomed out like a theatrical backdrop. This push and pull sensationalizes the concept of 'seeing out' of oneself while also 'seeing through' oneself.



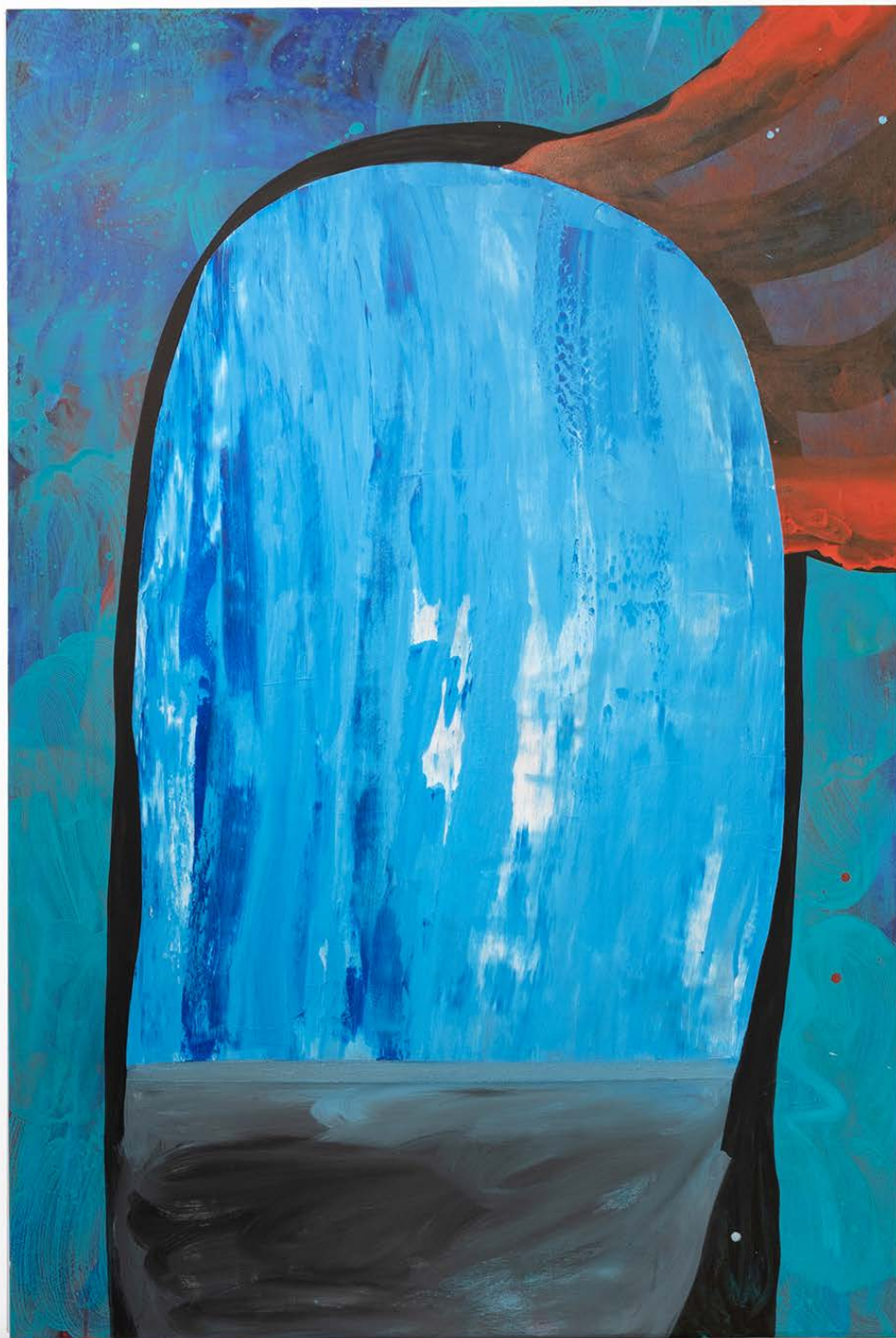


Libby Rosa, *Eye*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

## Cuts

My process of collage cut-up embodies the physical and emotional labor of painting.

The reconstruction of my paintings with collaged elements produces a sense of anxious fascination with my subjects. The cuts in my paintings come at moments when my process is frustrated. By rupturing the canvas, I make a physical problem to 'solve' that implants the anxieties of my work into the work itself. These cuts create voids in the body of the canvas, which are filled with fragments re-appropriated from previous paintings. In this way, the paintings are always generating and regenerating themselves, and each new work forms a serialized link with the ones that came before it.



Libby Rosa, *Waterfall Mouth*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

## Stories as Vehicles

Myths and stories have many functions in art. For me, they generate imagery. They don't just add a reference, they are vehicles for the paint to take form. I associate with stories about women and nature - Native American creation stories, vampire films with female protagonists, and Greek epics are a few genres I've mined for my work.





Libby Rosa, *Sisters*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

## Color

Along with a play of visual understanding, I work with the expressive qualities of color. I choose to work with colors that create contradictions and mixed emotions such as peaceful | menacing. In the work, yellows express feelings of the sublime and discomfort. Blues express water and the sky. In the latest waterfall paintings, watery blue washes perform as sublime scapes where yellow circles peacefully float. At the same time, the watery blues act as vast expanses where precious jewelry and falling women get lost forever.



Libby Rosa, *Anklets*, 2019, acrylic and airbrush on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.





Libby Rosa, *Sweetgrass*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches.

Libby Rosa (b. 1993, Pittsburgh, PA) is an artist living and working in NY. Her work is featured in New American Paintings (issue # 141) and Nightblock Magazine ( edition # I I ). She's had solo exhibitions at Bibliowicz Gallery (Sky Woman), Sweet Lorraine Gallery (SPACE), and Experimental Gallery (20 Ways to Make a Painting). She's been included in group shows at Safe Gallery (Or High Water), Signal Gallery (Big Snack), Marquee Projects (Oil,Acrylic, Clay) and Proto Gallery (Soft Reboot). She's curated group show at Tjaden Gallery with Brice Peterson (Afterwordsness) and Sweet Lorraine Gallery with Chris Lucius (Missing Me One Place Search Another). Rosa has attended residencies at Trestle Art Space, ASMBLY Session #1 and VCU (SSP, 2015). She received her BFA from University of Wisconsin - Madison (2015) and her MFA from Cornell University (2019).